



No two leaders are the same

TN28 Training Notes series: Leadership

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It was a superb service to welcome the new Minister and so well attended. The vacancy went pretty well, but I'm sure you feel it's good to have someone back at the helm. Now you can start to make real progress.

And so you start a new chapter in your church's story as the new Pastor or Vicar arrives. With Christopher replacing Christine the name has hardly changed. But you quickly realise that something is different. As the days go by a number of disturbing features come to light.

- **Leadership style**

Christine was easy-going and let people use their initiative. OK, so things perhaps got out of hand occasionally, but it wasn't that bad and several people blossomed.

Christopher seems to want to keep a much tighter rein on everything. He's made the point that everything must pass across his desk before implementation, and he's decided he'll chair each meeting of the church council – a practice you are not used to.

- **Delegation**

He is obviously marginalising the lay leadership teams Christine set up. The other members of the preaching team do not seem to appear very much on the rota now. Some of them were not exactly brilliant, but they were respected by all.

Christopher has never had a PA before, and Chloe now finds herself with time on her hands as he does his own keyboard work. In fact he knows rather more about IT than she does. He's terribly efficient, and Chloe finds him rather cold towards her. She'd loved her job before this; now she is not so sure.

- **Priorities**

You were in the middle of a three-year plan to build up the small group structure, but Christopher's idea is to establish an Alpha course and put everybody through it. He's suspended the small groups for six months.

You have three main missionary societies you pray for and give to, but he is on the Council of a different one and has insisted that you support that one too.

He does not want to spend his time visiting the elderly – he has different priorities. They are starting to gossip about this.

- **Church practice**

You have had an open baptism policy, but Christopher has said he wants no more than a dedication for families who are not members of the church.

Your Treasurer is about to get married ... to a divorcee. Your new man says he cannot allow a church wedding whatever your past policy has been.

- **External responsibilities**

Christine gave herself wholly for the church, but Christopher is on several national bodies and expects to be away at least one day per week. He is also in demand as a speaker for other churches' weekends away.

His wife has a high-powered full-time job, whereas Christine's husband put in hours on teens' work. The room in the manse/vicarage which you used as a church lounge now seems to be private property.

- **Gifts**

Christine was a lovely pastor. She never set the church on fire with her preaching and she was frustratingly inefficient, but everyone loved her. You asked for a teacher this time, but hadn't bargained on 35-minute sermons at each service. And Christopher still doesn't seem to know everyone's name, and he doesn't stay for coffee afterwards either.

Hang on a second! This seems a bit extreme. Perhaps, but usually several of these features will be present in some form in any ministerial change-over. It may well be in completely different ways from those shown above, or exactly as above but in the opposite direction. And I haven't even mentioned hot potatoes such as styles of worship.

When it happens, even when congregations half expect it, it can be a definite 'ouch!' situation. Many people are getting hurt.

But what many do not realise is that it is just as painful for Christopher. He's wondering why people seem to be against him when they had specifically asked for a preacher. He's struggling to learn names (not something that comes naturally to him) and people aren't helping him. He's never had a secretary before, and he has never been in sole charge of a church.

He's trying to get a grip on the work when the church had been left in a chaotic state with little direction and purpose, yet he is meeting opposition at every step. What did someone say about a honeymoon period?

PAUSE: Which of the above points ring any bells in your experience? Six suggestions now follow.

Minimising hurt

- 1 Both church and prospective Minister need to be given more help in how to go about the selection process. For example, if there are things that matter to either party (eg. baptism policy, working with a lay leadership team, expectations for the spouse) make your position known and discuss any differences openly.
- 2 Be prepared for the kind of changes listed above. The new Minister is quite likely to have a different style of leadership from his or her predecessor. Use the headings above as a checklist of changes you may have to expect, remembering that some changes will be necessary for spiritual development. But new pastors and vicars need to be sensitive to what people are used to as well.
- 3 Neither party should load the other with expectations they cannot match. Churches conveniently forget the questionable features of the former Minister, and expect the new person to bring all sorts of new things as well as all the good points they are already used to. Be realistic, and exercise a touch of humility (both church and Minister).
- 4 Priorities need to be discussed and agreed by the council/deacons/session when the new Minister has had enough time to find his or her feet. By all means let them take a lead, but they need to bring people along with them.
- 5 There needs to be more training and support available to help both church and Minister through the first year. An external consultant can give an unbiased view of a painful situation and some helpful words of wisdom for all concerned. But the new Minister must be prepared to listen and take action. Some are far too threatened by this kind of idea.
- 6 Tensions in this area usually arise because of lack of open communication. Both pastor and congregation need to be vulnerable to what in themselves may be causing problems for others, as well as helping the other party to see what may be causing problems for them. Perhaps the new Minister could meet with a select leadership group after a few months for an honest assessment of where changes may be causing friction and what can be done about it.

These notes show up some of the potential tensions that can exist over the clergy-lay divide. In many churches the role of the clergy has been gradually changing over the past few years and expectations may therefore be hazy at present. You need to balance the needs for leadership and for change with a clear understanding of what can lead to unnecessary pain.

These notes are available at www.john-truscott.co.uk/resources/training/tn28.pdf. They are based on a piece first written by the author for CPAS's *Church Leadership* Magazine. For indexes of all items available on the site, visit the [resources page](#).

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of his running an event for you, perhaps one to help your church draw up a profile for a new Minister.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN28 under Leadership.

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